

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Scientists say a celebrated collection of fossils known as Peking Man is at least 100,000 years older than believed, shedding new light on the evolution of humans in Asia.

The findings by scientists at the University of Southern California and the University of Guizhou in China suggests that primitive hominids in Asia may have perished before modern humans came into existence, or that they evolved into our direct ancestors. Hominids are an evolutionary grouping of primates that includes anatomically modern humans.

F. Clark Howell, a University of California, Berkeley expert on human origins, called the new research "terrific."

The study was funded by the National Science Foundation and is scheduled for publication this summer in the Chinese scientific journal *Acta Anthropologica Sinica*.

Researcher Richard Ku of USC used a more sophisticated dating technique than was used before to determine the age of the limestone cave deposits in which the fossilized bones were found in China.

He said Tuesday that his preliminary research shows that the bones, from a cavern at Zhoukoudian near Beijing, are at least 400,000 years old and perhaps considerably older.

The research appears to contradict the contentions of some experts on human evolution that the Peking Man deposits were so recent that they suggest that primitive hominids co-existed with the direct ancestors of anatomically modern humans.

The remains of the tool-using Peking Man, considered an example of *homo erectus*, were discovered in 1921. They were among the first pre-human fossils found in Asia and have played an important role in theories of human development.

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